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TAGS: [IZ](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [MCAP](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT MAYSAN: IA GEN PLANS MAYSAN OFFENSIVE

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Darrell Jenks for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Maysan reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (S) Summary: On April 13 the PRT met with Major General Habib to discuss the recent clashes in al-'Amara as well as future prospects for security improvement. The clashes in al-'Amara between the Iraqi Army (IA) and militant elements of the Sadrist movement exposed the instability of the security situation in Maysan. Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), with the unspoken support of the government, feels confident in challenging the IA and maintaining a stronghold on the province. Maysan has served as a refuge for JAM-affiliated criminal elements throughout the southern region and will continue to do so unless the situation changes. To date, Maysan has not received the same level of Iraqi government attention or military support given to other provinces under Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). This lack of attention may soon change. End Summary.

Habib and the Crisis  
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[1](#)3. (S) PRT Maysan visited MG Habib, the 10th Division IA Commander, at his office in Camp Mittica on 13 April 2008 to discuss recent events in Maysan and solicit his views on events and ways forward. Habib referred to the events in Basra and Maysan, as well as other parts of the country, as the "crisis." When asked about events, Habib said he joined his brigade in al-'Amara at the beginning of the crisis and stayed there for four days. Although the current situation in al-'Amara is calm, during the days of the crisis (25 March ) 29 March) there were armed men in the streets; JAM targeted the IA; and the IA targeted anyone who was armed. According to Habib, IA casualties included two officers and twelve soldiers killed and forty wounded. The IA also lost three HMMVs while crossing the Republic Bridge in al-'Amara. Although Habib did not mention it during these discussions, separate reporting indicates that on 27 March 2008, a wide-scale attack was launched on the airport where the IA was located.

[1](#)4. (S) Habib was vague regarding the cessation of hostilities between JAM and the IA. When questioned about mediation by tribal leaders, he said that although he met with the tribal leaders twice, the IA was not looking for mediation as they had orders to fulfill. Ultimately, the clashes came to an end because neither group wanted to open a new front in Maysan while the fighting continued in Basra.

The Police  
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[1](#)5. (S) Habib was disappointed by the actions of the Iraqi Police in Maysan. The IP were not helpful and the Provincial Director of Police (PDOP) Brigadier 'Ali Wahab is ineffective and co-opted by JAM. Wahab has packed the IP with militia and has an agreement with the militia that roughly equates to

"if you don't attack me, I won't attack you." Furthermore, Wahab reportedly moves weapons for JAM, including rockets. HABIB argued that he cannot conduct further operations in Maysan unless the PDoP is changed as he feels that he is leaving his "back wide open." Habib claimed that Wahab changed all the IP Unit commanders and replaced them with JAM affiliates and that he removed all of the professionals from the force. Habib holds that "there will be no security in al-'Amara if the PDoP stays the same ) a leadership change is imperative."

A military solution?

16. (S) When discussing the future security situation in Maysan, Habib argued that it was necessary to have a military operation similar or larger to what occurred in Basra. He holds that the situation in Maysan is worse than that in Basra because there is a larger number of militia and criminal activity associated with their presence is rampant. It is important to focus on Maysan as it is now a safe haven for people fleeing Basra and other places. Furthermore, Maysan will continue to feed instability in other provinces with fighters, weapons, propaganda, etc. According to Habib, Prime Minister al-Maliki's vision is to clear the southern cities of militia, and Habib announced that he is ready for the second stage of southern operations that will focus on al-'Amara. The first part of that plan includes issuing arrest warrants for criminals who attacked the IA during the crisis. Habib put his forces on display on Saturday, 12 April 2008. Using both the brigades from as-Samawa and Maysan, Habib directed convoys to enter al- Amara from four sides (al-Basra, an-Nassiriyah, al-Kut, and al-Kahla').

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17. (S) Currently, Habib only has one brigade located in Maysan. In order to conduct such an operation he said he would need more IA troops than were sent to Basra, plus U.S. support and reinforcements. He revealed that he recently got approved to add another regiment to the existing brigade. Habib also thinks another division is necessary to secure Maysan. He holds that the border alone needs one brigade as the Maysan Border Patrol is ineffective. He claims that it is necessary to close off the border to conduct any successful operation as 70 percent of the targets will go to Iran when the operations start and then return when they have concluded. Habib said that he had been in discussions with a Special Forces (SF) Commander regarding a joint IA/SF operation in al-'Amara that will focus on arrests and raids. SF involvement may only include technical assistance. He is currently waiting for U.S. approval to begin such an operation. The proposed joint operation commence after kinetic activity in al-Basra concludes, and will be followed by a larger scale operation.

18. (S) Despite his strong opinions regarding military action, Habib concluded his statements by saying, "I wish Muqtada as-Sadr would issue an edict for JAM to turn over their weapons as this is better than taking lives in an operation, but if the situation continues as is, there will be no choice but to conduct one."

Comment: Governance success, security failures

19. (S) Comment: Habib seems to sincerely want to take action in Maysan; he wants to push the militias out of al-'Amara and al-Majjar al-Kabeer and wants more control of the border. Any kinetic operations in Maysan will negatively impact the PRT's relationship with the provincial government. Past military operations (for example, the British Operation Dorado conducted in 2006) have resulted in the disengagement of the government from the PRT and rendered the PRT incapable of conducting any business in the province. However, over the past year the PRT has steadily expanded its network of

contacts in Maysan and has devised a three-pronged engagement strategy that not only focuses on government-engagement, but also engagement with civil society organizations and tribes. Even if the government decides to give the PRT the silent treatment during and after any kinetic operations, the PRT believes that it will be able to continue to interact with non-governmental actors in the province.

¶10. (S) Maysan's post-PIC experience is unique. On the one hand, the government is trying to address the needs of its constituency by successfully executing its budget and supporting provincial development. On the other hand, the strong presence of militia (which is accepted by the government) threatens the stability of the province on a daily basis as tensions are more often erupting into violence. Moreover, the nature of criminal activity in the province (weapons smuggling and stashing, insurgent training, bomb creation, etc.) has brought negative attention to the province and contributed to the destabilization of other regions of the country. Ultimately, any successes that may result from the development of good fiscal governance on the part of Maysan's leaders will be overshadowed by their failures to truly provide security and a stable environment conducive to development. End Comment.  
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